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8-14-1811

Letter from George Sibley to Dr. John H. Robinson, August 14, 1811

George Champlin Sibley

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Dear Sir:

Being in haste and in sickness I forbear to comment on the extraordinary character of the calumny contained in the annexed extract of a letter from Capt. Clemson to the Secretary of War date 20 July 1810 which I have recently received from Washington in a private letter from my friend Gen. Macom. You can reflect on it at your leisure so far as I am implicated in the charges made in capt. C. letter an explanation is requested of me by Gen. Macom which I am preparing to lay before him an you will readily conceive (much better than I can inform you) how anxious I must feel to refute this calumny with all possible dispatch whatever may be the real character of Capt. Clemson whether good or bad is a matter of no moment in the present case the honorable office which he holds necessarily gives a fictitious importance to his name and serves to conceal from the world his faibles and his vices and you have been how effectually it has been interposed to screen him from merited punishment. I have to request the favor of you to state fully and formally in the form of a deposition what you know relative to the arrests of the two trading boats alluded to in Capt. C.'s letter and get the deposition properly authenticated. Altho that affairs is one of the few that has occurred at this place which I assumed to myself some credit for having taken an active part in; yet I find it somewhat difficult it has been so long out of my thoughts. To recall to my memory the principal circumstances the following I believe are the modt prominent which I merely sketch to serve you as a kind of glimmering light by which to aid your recollections of the affair: ---

1. --- I have in imperfect idea that there was some talk about the boats before they arrived here among the Indians and that Paul was implicated in some improper expressions to the Indians respecting them but of this I will not say anything positive – you were in the way to hear and know this officially.
2. --- The Boats arrived here sometime in the month of October 1809 -- they were owned by er in charge of Rubedous and Dorion one of these was destined to the Kansas the other I believe to some tribe farther up the river or the evening of their arrival there was some stir among the Osages indicating a disposition to commit some act of violence on them of which you were apprised I believe by the owners probably the Osages insisted on seeing their licenses.
3. --- I think it was after supper (I know it was dark and raining a little) that you and myself went down to the Boats having heard that the Indians were crowding about them and I believe you prevailed on them to disperse -- the chief Nesamone and the Big Soldier appeared to the ring leaders.
4. --- I believe it was after we returned from the Boats that you and P. Love and myself were standing on the Hill at Block House U.S. so called where Lousoreille joined us in great perturbation and lamented that his people were like to commit some act of violence in the Boats observing particularly that the chief and Big Soldier were the ringleaders. I desired Soureille to exert himself to prevent his people from committing any outrage on the Boats --- I told him that any right to stop them that they were American Citizens and as such I looked upon them as my brothers and considered it my duty to prevent the Osages from molesting them or their boats and I told him to go down and inform his people that if they did molest the boats I should shut them out of the factory – on this Sousoreille went to the boats and did exert himself

to prevail on the chief and big soldier to disperse the Indians and give over their attempt They remained peaceable that night.

5. --- The Boats started the next day about ten o'clock and a number of Indians followed the shore whether the Indians were armed or not at that time I know not as I did not see them, in fact I was busy making my public accounts and had no times to attend to the Indians on their motions.

The boats it appears were attempting to pass a Sand bar on which they frequently grounded the Indians seeing this waded to them either for the purpose of assisting or insulting them and some scuffling ensued between the Boatman and them in which one of the Indians received a very severe blow from a Boatpole just as the Boat was disengaged from the Sandbar -- this exasperated the rest of the Indians to such a degree that they drove the boats back and followed them running on the shore. It was then that I first saw them being called by the general alarm. -- I saw a number of the Indians running to their lodges for their guns and return to the river they were in great rage -- at this moment a report was circulating that one of the Indians has been killed -- fearing for the safety of the boats and crew I went to the river, you I believe went with me, the Boats had just landed when we got down and the Indians collecting in great numbers at the landing -- the scene that followed must still be fresh in your memory -- it is impossible for any person who interviewed that affair to doubt that your very great exertions prevented the Indians from committing a serious act of violence on the boats in question and in my opinion prevented bloodshed.

6. -- After this affair, and after you had dispersed the Indians you and I went to the camp and found the principal men assembled at the lodge of the Big Soldiers I expressed fully my opinion of the act they had just committed and informed them that for the present I should shut the factory against them --- I certainly did not conceal from them my displeasure.
7. --- Heretofore there had been no interference from the Garrison except to place the boats in view and in charge of one of the sentries --- Capt. Clemson certainly knew every important circumstance of this affair. He was looking on at the time you and myself were scuffling with the Indians -- perhaps it was to you that he observed "Such affairs are common and of no consequence" or words to that effect -- I remember I expressed indignation of such a proceeding being suffered to pass under the eye of a Garrison.
8. ---The next day you and I called on Capt. C. to request his interference in passing the boats and proposed certain steps to that end which Capt. C agreed to adopt in substance, and did I believe adopt this was the first of his interference except putting the Boats under guard for a short time as mentioned above -- after the Boats had at length passed you were present at my room (it was after I ask when I had some conversation with Nersumone and Sousoreille who were apologizing for what their people had done, and begging me to permit them to trade perhaps you may recollect the terror of my observations to them.
9. ---On the whole you know that so far from exciting the Osages to stop the Boats, I zealously exerted myself to prevent them. it is probable that Rubedoux and Dorion may have expressed to you some opinion as to the primary cause of the conduct of the Osages and the eventual cause of their passing. If so, it will occur to you perhaps I still have a very print recollections that Paul was much censured for some report he spread among the Osages, relative to some boats, that

were expected here. If you know of any agency Paul had in the matter in question you will be pleased to state it. And I must also request the favor of you to depose to what you know and believe generally as to Paul's general character. You will serve me much Sir if you will collect the circumstances of that transaction as you remember them, and state them fully and clearly in form of a deposition --- I have also to beg of you the favor to procure the most respectable and unquestionable testimony in your power as to your own character and reputation. I know this is a delicate request but it will afford me such infinite pleasure to have it in my power to defeat this calumny which both as it relates to you and myself that I have prevailed on myself to name it to you and I hope you will comply. It is impossible to say what secret prejudices have been made against you at Washington yours silence will give a sanction to them. I have heard you mention Mr. Meigs as your friend you ought to rouse yourself and procure the testimony of your friends in your behalf, seeing that your enemies not content with the injury they have done your fortune are attempting secretly to ruin your character it only wants an exertion to defeat their purposes this you will permit me to say, you owe to yourself your friends and your enemies. Should you think proper to favor me by a compliance with these request be pleased to enclose the depositions and testimonials of your own good name, to Gen. Clark at St. Louis, addressed and under seal to me, with a request to General C. to keep them till I call for them in person. I expect to be in St. Louis sometime in October next on my way to the seat of government having obtained furlow from the Superintendent. I propose to lay a full and complete refutation of these charges before him and shall be much disappointed if you do not put it in my power to vindicate your character before him and the Secretary of War. -- forward these proofs by mail to Gen. Clark with all possible dispatch.

(about 30 lines of foreign matter omitted here).

Very respectfully,

Your most obedient servant.

G. C. Sibley.

Dr. Jno. H. Robinson,
Kaskaskia.